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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: CHINESE AMBASSADOR DENIES ANY CHINESE
ROLE IN KYRGYZ DECISION TO CLOSE MANAS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Chinese Ambassador to Kazakhstan Cheng Guoping told the Ambassador on February 24 that he expects China will agree to participate in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) for commercial shipment of non-lethal supplies to Afghanistan. He described China's principal objective in Central Asia as promoting regional stability. Cheng confided that Foreign Minister Tazhin will be in Beijing March 29-31 to prepare for an April visit to China by President Nazarbayev. He denied China had any role in getting the Kyrgyz to close Manas Air Base, claiming the Chinese "don't take any pleasure" from the decision while adding that, in any event, the closure is not a done deal. Cheng argued that the developments surrounding Manas and the Georgia war have strengthened Russia's hand in Central Asia and the CIS as a whole, while weakening U.S. influence. China will be watching Ukraine's parliamentary elections closely since the results will further determine the relative influence of Russia and the United States across the region. He said the Chinese have not yet signed an agreement with Kazakhstan that will allow them to construct a new building for the Chinese Embassy in Astana. Their current rented embassy space is cramped and inconvenient, and Cheng expressed appreciation that the Ambassador hosts their meetings, since, in his opinion, they cannot have secure conversations in Cheng's own office. END SUMMARY.

EXPECTS CHINA TO SIGN ON TO NDN

12. (C) During a February 24 meeting with the Ambassador, Chinese Ambassador to Kazakhstan Cheng Guoping said that Beijing has noticed that U.S. foreign policy is changing under President Obama, with the United States paying greater attention to Asia, including to Afghanistan -- which China sees as the top foreign policy priority for the Obama Administration. Cheng described Afghanistan's problems as "very complicated," and said that Afghan President Karzai seems to control only Kabul itself. Nevertheless, China strongly supports Coalition efforts against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and is particularly concerned about Afghan narco-trafficking, which directly affects China, Cheng explained. "Fighting the Taliban and Al-Qaeda is the responsibility of all UN member states," he asserted.

13. (C) Cheng noted that Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and

Tajikistan have agreed to participate in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) for commercial transport of non-lethal goods for U.S. troops in Afghanistan. He described the NDN as a "positive development" and said the Chinese MFA is actively reviewing the U.S. proposal that China participate in the NDN, too. While no final decision has been made, he expected that in the end, China will sign on to the NDN. "Including China in the NDN is a judicious decision," he argued. Cheng noted that there will be an SCO meeting in Moscow on March 27 to discuss Afghanistan, and predicted that the meeting will result in "positive decisions on relevant issues."

CLAIMS NO CHINESE ROLE IN MANAS CLOSURE

14. (C) Cheng explained that China's principal objective in Central Asia is the promotion of regional stability. He singled out Uzbekistan as unstable internally -- which he claimed makes Uzbek President Karimov reluctant to travel outside his country. Cheng confided that Kazakhstani Foreign Minister Tazhin will travel to Beijing March 29-31 to prepare for an April visit to China by President Nazarbayev.

15. (C) The Ambassador asked Cheng about the Chinese government's views on the closure of Manas Air Base. Cheng responded dismissively, "Frankly speaking, this didn't have much to do with us." He said the Kyrgyz decision to make Manas available to the United States after September 11 was the right thing to do. As far as the Chinese understand, the Kyrgyz are closing Manas now for their own domestic reasons. Their economic situation is bad, which has caused a lot of problems for President Bakiyev. He needed money, but the

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United States didn't agree to pay more for the base. Russia, however, agreed to provide \$2 billion in loans and investment and pushed Bakiyev to close the base in return. In any event, sovereign countries have a right to make their own decisions, and other countries don't have a right to intervene, Cheng argued.

16. (C) To test his reaction, the Ambassador told Cheng that the Kyrgyz had hinted to us privately that the Chinese would not provide them assistance unless they closed Manas. Cheng dismissed this claim, saying, "I was previously head of our MFA's Eurasia Department before coming here (last fall) as Ambassador and would have been in a position to know. I don't think this corresponds with the facts. We have been providing them assistance all along, and in 2007 even gave them almost a billion yuan to help them with the Bishkek SCO Summit. We don't take any pleasure from the closure of Manas. Perhaps the Kyrgyz don't want to hurt your feelings, and that's why they put all the responsibility on Russia and China." In any event, Cheng maintained that the closure of Manas is not a done deal -- whether it actually happens will depend on U.S.-Kyrgyz negotiations and, more importantly, on whether the Russians actually follow through on their financial commitments. He expressed doubts about Russia's ability to do so because of its own economic problems.

SAYS SITUATION IN CIS NOW MORE FAVORABLE TO RUSSIA

17. (C) Cheng maintained that, taken together, the latest developments with Manas and the results of the Georgia conflict have changed the balance of power between the United States and Russia within the CIS. After the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the Russians were in a bad position, but now the situation is favorable to them. The Russians have recently adopted a more aggressive approach toward the other CIS countries, especially toward Central Asia. China is closely watching the upcoming Ukrainian parliamentary elections, the outcome of which will be a further critical determinant of the relative influence of Russia and the United States across the whole CIS region. Cheng claimed that Ukrainian Prime Minister Tymoshenko was once pro-American, but now is leaning more toward Russia, hinting

that this is an indication the winds are blowing Russia's way in Ukraine. "We hope that in any event you can improve your relations with Russia, and that the United States and Russia will cooperate more in the international area," Cheng stated.

BELIEVES UNITED STATES NO LONGER FAVORS COLOR REVOLUTIONS

18. (C) Cheng explained that he has been following the Ambassador's public statements very closely, and in comparing these statements to those of the Ambassador's predecessor, he has detected a shift in U.S. policy toward Kazakhstan and the rest of Central Asia. The United States now seems more focused on promoting stability and prosperity, and no longer wants to foster "color revolutions." Cheng said he found this approach "persuasive" in winning the support of the Central Asian countries. The Ambassador explained that our policy had never been to foster revolutions, but explained that he personally believes it is more effective to be frank with other governments in private than to criticize them publicly.

ADMITS STILL NO AGREEMENT ON NEW CHINESE EMBASSY

19. (C) The Ambassador asked Cheng about progress on a new building for the Chinese Embassy in Astana. Cheng said with some degree of exasperation that China still has not signed an agreement with Kazakhstan that will allow the Chinese to begin construction. He said he was envious of the U.S. Embassy, because the Chinese are currently occupying inconvenient, cramped rented space. He expressed appreciation that the Ambassador hosts their meetings, since, in his opinion, they cannot have secure conversations in Cheng's own office. Cheng noted that his daughter will soon be studying in the United States -- she will make a final decision in the next month among Columbia, Duke, and the

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University of Chicago -- and asked for assistance in obtaining a multiple-entry U.S. visa for his wife, so that she can visit the daughter regularly.

HOAGLAND